"The macabre nature of the shrunken head trophies (tsantsas) of the Jibaro Indians has long assured them a ready sale to curio-hunters. As Stirling has pointed out in a valuable paper,[1] this demand has given rise to a considerable business in the manufacture of counterfeit tsantsas, with the result that a large proportion of the specimens in private (and some public) collections are in fact the heads of unclaimed dead from hospitals and pauper asylums prepared by taxidermists. The laws of Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil prohibit the export of tsantsas, but numbers are surreptitiously hawked to tourists along the Pacific coast from the Panama Canal southwards. The prices asked may range from £1 to £10 or more, according to the estimated means of the customer. While some of these may be authentic, the majority certainly are not."

[1] Stirling, M. W., Historical and Ethnographical Material on the Jivaro Indians. Bureau of American Ethnology: Bulletin 117. Washington, 1938. Cf. also Rivet, P., 'A propos 'de Tsantsa,' Journ. Soc. Américanistes de Paris, N:S: 24, 1932, pp. 213-16."

'The Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, possesses two such forgeries, purchased in Ecuador and presented in 1936. One of these has now been placed on exhibition alongside the genuine tsantsas, with a label drawing attention to the features which mark it as false. Most of these features are apparent in Pl. C (fig. 1), which also shows an authentic Jibaro specimen (fig. 2) for purposes of comparison.

In the counterfeit tsantsa:

(a) the head is less thoroughly shrunk, the integument being consequently not so thick and continuing to exude a certain amount of oil;
(b) although slight prognathous distortion is present it is not sufficient to give the characteristic snout-like appearance seen in fig. 2; further, the dome of the head is high (reaching well above the upper edge of the head-band) instead of low and elongated, and the usual depressions in the region of the temples are lacking;
(c) the lips show no signs of perforation by the chonta-wood pins used by the Jibaro during the shrinking, and are sewn with light threads in place of the normal heavy fringe of cotton string;
(d) the top of the head is not pierced for the suspending cord;
(e) the posterior median incision is carried much farther forward over the crown of the head than is done in authentic specimens;

(f) the lobes of the ears are not pierced, as is done by Jibaros of both sexes early in life; instead, bone ornaments have been thrust through the rims of the ears, which does not accord with Jibaro practice;
(g) the facial down has not been singed off, nor the skin polished (the shiny surface being due to grease);
(h) the feathered head-band of beaten palm-bark is of a type not worn by living Jibaros, nor are genuine tsantsas ever provided with any kind of headgear;
(i) the hair is of finer texture than in most Indian specimens; it is less abundant and the short side-locks affected by most Jibaros are absent.

It is realized that the last detail is not definitive in that the Jibaros may still occasionally take heads from non-Indian victims (Stirling mentions a successful attack on a settlement in 1925), but considered in relation to the other foregoing points of variation it may be taken as strengthening the assumption that the head is that of a female European or mestiza hospital casualty. As final confirmation it may be added that part of a Quito newspaper of 1936 was found wadded into the crown in a manner suggesting that it was used to preserve the shape during reduction."

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"The second counterfeit in the Pitt Rivers collections is nearly identical in form and decoration with that illustrated, but is further adorned with two long pendants of the elytra of the beetle Mallaspis antennatus, tipped with feathers and human hair. Similar pendants are frequently hung from the ear-lobes of genuine tsantsas (see fig. 2) but in this specimen they are attached to the back of the head-band.

The above-mentioned particulars correspond closely with the criteria given by Stirling for distinguishing spurious from genuine tsantsas. The same author suggests examination of the stitching of the posterior incision which makes possible the removal of the skin from the skull. The professional taxidermist with his superior equipment tends to make a rather neater seam than is usually to be found in the Indian article,[58] although this is not invariably the case. It should be added that the work of some counterfeiters is a good deal harder to detect than are the two examples described above.

Not all non-genuine tsantsas have been made for commercial purposes. Rivet (2)

2. 'Rivet, P., 'Les Indiens Jibaros.' L'Anthropologie, XVIII-XIX. Paris, 1907-8. (Chapter entitled 'Têtes 'Momifiées ou Tsantsas,' Vol. XIX, pp 69-87)."

illustrates a passable counterfeit made by an Ecuadorean medical student, and in 1893 an Austrian doctor named Hein (3) described four which he had prepared from the heads of deceased patients. In both these cases the motive was to test the technique of reduction as reported by travellers. Hein's attempt to shrink a fifth head by drying in the sun failed completely."

'3. Hein, Wilhelm, 'Die Kopftrophäen der Jívaros.' Mitth. Anthrop. Ges. Wien, XXIII. Sitzungsberichte, p. 28. Vienna, 1893."

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"Mummified animal heads, usually of monkeys or sloths, are sometimes seen in collections. Of these the sloth heads are likely to be genuine. The Jibaros are elaborately careful not to take the head of a victim who is related to the slayer, however long adopted into the enemy band. In such cases, as also when a vigorous resistance prevents the securing of an unrelated victim's head, the slayer may at some later date take the head of a sloth (Choloepus didactylus) and prepare a token trophy, called uñushi. Generally similar ritual procedure accompanies the preparation of the uñushi. Finished trophies display the lip-fringe and suspending cord seen in tsantsas, but the degree of reduction is proportionally less. Some other animals may be similarly treated when one of their number is supposed to have caused the death of a Jibaro.

Stirling persuaded a Yaupe Jibaro to reduce the head of a monkey, but this was done without ritual and simply as a demonstration of the shrinking technique. Preserved monkeys' heads seen by the writer have certain features in common with the counterfeit tsantsas and it is to be doubted whether they are of Jibaro origin. Even where this should be the case they probably represent nothing more than purely commercial examples of Indian taxidermy."

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"Since the foregoing was sent to press, [KS: Counterfeit 'Tsantsas' in the Pitt Rivers Museum] Mr. Stirling has drawn my attention to a journalist's account of a domestic workshop on the outskirts of Quito where 'shrunken heads' are made in quantity from goat- and dog-skin shaped over clay moulds and shaved in the appropriate places. One diagnostic feature of these counterfeits is that the hairs of both eyebrows necessarily run in the same direction. (Ludwig Bemelmans, 'The Head-Hunters of the Quito Hills.' The New Yorker, April 12, 1941. New York.)"